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Tall Ships Today: Their Remarkable Story

Reviewed by Pete Allison

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Rowe, N., Dadswell, R., Mudie, C., & Rauworth, M. (2014). *Tall ships today: Their remarkable story*. London: Adlard Coles Nautical, Bloomsbury.

ISBN: 978-1-47-290346-4 (hardback), 224 pages

This book sets out to give insight into a fleet of around 100 sail training tall ships currently operating around the world and also to give a sense of what it is like to sail aboard one of these vessels. The book has four chapters: Origins and Evolution, The Tall Ships, The Tall Ship Experience and Racing on Tall Ships. The book has appeared with some anticipation and for good reason. The authors bring experience and insights into tall ship sailing (or sail training) that is unrivalled. My first impression of the book was one of quality in all respects. The quality is evident throughout in the writing, images and overall 'feel' of the book. The chapter sequence can be interpreted in two ways. Initially the chapters suggest a chronological approach or 'looking back to look forward' approach; but a second interpretation is that the central concerns are deliberately at the heart of the book: the ships and the value of the experiences aboard them. My inclination is that the latter interpretation was a conscious choice of the book's architect, editor and principal author Nigel Rowe who, together with the three contributing authors, have a clear vision of the value of sailing beyond learning to sail.

For good reasons this has been a challenging book to review. If the book were solely of interest to one discreet audience the review could be written with the audience in mind. However, the book has appeal to, among others, historians, sailing enthusiasts, educators, recreators and of course to academics. As I read through the book my mind wandered to consider both a nephew (10 years old) and an aging relative — both of whom I am confident would devour the book in their own ways!

Of course the current practices of sailing on tall ships in different parts of the world vary and the reasons for this are explored through Mudie's opening chapter on Origins and Evolution. This chapter does as the title suggests but adds much more to the book. It contains fascinating insights, such as how Greek ship builders place the bottom of the tree facing to the front of the vessel as the wood is stronger this way, or that some ship builders insisted on using only trees grown on particular hillsides (p. 22), practices which continue

to this day. This chapter appears at the beginning of the book and allows the reader to make sense of the whole book. It provides context and rationale for everything that follows. A point that is neatly summarised by Rauworth who identifies three important values of sailing ships as: historical/maritime heritage, training for a seafaring career and character development (p. 30). It is this last value which the majority of the book is concerned with.

The centre of the book (pp. 34–165) consists of a review of 105 different vessels from 38 countries providing a short narrative, brief specifications and images that are inspiring throughout. This provides a taster of the diversity of vessels involved in sail training and just enough to tease the reader to find out more (readily available on the internet via website addresses given in the book). For those not familiar with ship rigs there are fantastic line drawings (pp. 36–7) illustrating everything from a Gaff Cutter to a Four Mast Barque. Rauworth's introduction to this section offers a valuable overview in relation to the history and purposes of the ships featured.

To complement the obvious historical and aesthetic appeal of the ships the third chapter concentrates on the current day experiences of sailing aboard these vessels. Using a case study to provide a rich and nuanced visceral experience of a first time trainee, Rowe demonstrates a grasp of the depth of learning and profound influences sail training can have by noting towards the end

He began to think that perhaps the whole experience had, as his friend Paula back home had said it would, changed his life. Although it would be more accurate, he thought, to say it had given him the self assurance and ability to change his life himself — to be in the driving seat, to think differently and with broader horizons about what mattered to him as a person and what he wanted to do with his life. (p. 173)

This presents a subtle understanding of the developmental processes at play and careful attention has been paid to the language used to describe such experiences. The chapter then goes on to introduce experiential learning and several schemes that are in place to enhance the quality of learning for all involved in sail training. In so doing the second and third chapter of the book are cleverly 'sewn' together.

The final chapter of the book contains spectacular photographs primarily taken on tall ships races and in host ports demonstrating the enormity of these events and the impact they have in so many ways (personal, social, cultural, economic). The interspersed narrative gives an overview of the logistics and work involved in running such events which go beyond sailing and into the territory of mega events. Through this chapter Dadswell moves smoothly between the individual benefits of taking part for young trainees, for example noting they "...will have little idea about how the intensity of this new experience is going to affect each of them..." (p. 210), the macro consideration such as race planning (p. 188) and the importance of political relations (p. 196).

The book provides insights and an overview of sail training around the world. It is very well presented in all senses and refreshingly does not fall into one neat category. The authors recognise the different ways in which sailing is used as a form of education, cultural exchange, training, youth work and skill development. There is something here for everyone and I can thoroughly recommend adding this to your own library, reading lists and 'favourite books' shelves. Furthermore, at a time when it is possible to study degrees (undergraduate and postgraduate) in outdoor education without learning anything about sailing or going sailing this book has

an important role to play in raising the profile of sail training and encouraging the inclusion of these opportunities in such programmes of study. This book is destined to become a 'must read, must have' for anyone serious about understanding breadth and depth of practices and values in sail training — a crucially important sector of outdoor education. The introduction to the book by HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh (a strong advocate of sail training and experiential learning) concludes

I very much welcome the publication of this splendid book There are some spectacular photographs in this book, but they cannot convey the real thing. That has to be experienced 'live', but the effect such an experience has on the young crews of these ships is all too evident to those who have known them before and after their time at sea. (p. 6)

There is no doubt in my mind that anyone opening this book will be inspired to go and 'experience 'live' the 'real thing'.

About the reviewer

Pete Allison is senior lecturer in values and experiential learning in the Institute for Sport, PE and Health Sciences at The University of Edinburgh. His research interests are in adventure, expeditions, sailing, cross cultural education, Duke of Edinburgh award, skiing and philosophy of education. He is particularly interested in the use of experiential learning for values and character education, virtue ethics and personal development; and application of the works of Aristotle, MacIntyre and Kurt Hahn in understanding the origins of expeditions.

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